

**Penang Umno against Putrajaya redeveloping RMAF land**  
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Penang Umno has made the rare move of opposing Putrajaya's plans to redevelop the Royal Malaysian Air Force (RMAF) base in Butterworth on mainland Penang into an integrated mixed development project, claiming that the project will not benefit the people or the state.

State Umno liaison committee chairman Datuk Zainal Abidin Osman said they were strongly against the plan, which had been decided without consulting any of them.

The base is located in Teluk Air Tawar in the parliamentary constituency of Tasek Gelugor. Both the state and parliamentary seats are held by Barisan Nasional reps Datuk Jahara Hamid and Datuk Shabudin Yahya.

"Penang Umno decided during our meeting on February 28 to object to the plan. We also presented our objection to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak on March 1. We are now waiting for his response.

"We have considered the redevelopment plan from the aspects of security, environment, social, geo-politics and the people's interest. The project will not benefit Penang.

"We hope Putrajaya will reconsider the redevelopment plan. As long as the proposed project is not in the interest of the people, Penang Umno will maintain its stand to object to it," he said today after chairing a meeting at the Penang Federal Action Council, a body that oversees federal projects in the state.

It is learnt that some Barisan Nasional elected reps in Penang are threatening to resign in protest if the plan proceeds.

Penang has only 10 state assemblymen and three MPs from Barisan Nasional (BN). The remaining 30 state seats and 10 parliamentary seats are held by Pakatan Rakyat.

It was reported last month that joint-venture company TSR Capital Bhd had obtained the green light from the federal government to negotiate terms for the proposed relocation and reconstruction of the RMAF base.

"What the developer builds there will be beyond the reach of the people. If we are talking about projects good for the people like low- and medium-cost homes and a public recreation area, Penang Umno will reconsider our objection," he said.

Yesterday, Penang Chief Minister Lim Guan Eng also questioned the proposed redevelopment, urging the Defence Ministry (Mindef) to explain how the project will benefit the people.

He also threatened that the state will not approve any applications for the project if it is proven that it is not good for Penangites.

Lim, who complained that the state government was not consulted on the matter, questioned how Penang Umno could have no knowledge of such a huge plan when the base was located in a BN held constituency.

He said the state has requested a meeting with Mindef on March 26 to be briefed on the project.

The RMAF base was built as the Royal Air Force base for the then British Malaya in 1941. It was used to defend Malaya against the Japanese insurgency before it was handed over to Australia in 1957. The base was renamed Royal Australian Air Force. It was renamed again as the RMAF after it was handed over to Malaysia in June 1988.

Meanwhile, Zainal said the stalled Penang Sentral project in Butterworth is scheduled to kick off in September this year, if the project gets all the necessary applications approved by the local authorities.

The project will start off with its public transportation terminal that will cater to commuters using the railway, ferry, taxi and bus express. It is scheduled to be completed in 2017. – March 20, 2014.

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